DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 899 HE 030 218

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TITLE Equalizing Opportunity in NAFEO Institutions: A Case for Internal and External Action.
PUB DATE Mar 95
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at Annual Conference of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (20th, Washington, DC, March 1995).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alumni; Basic Skills; *Black Colleges; Black Students; Curriculum Development; Educational Environment; *Educational Objectives; Educational Opportunities; Educational Quality; Educationally Disadvantaged; *Equal Education; Higher Education; *Instructional Improvement; Mastery Learning; Nondiscriminatory Education; Self Fulfilling Prophecies; Special Needs Students; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Expectations of Students; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS National Association Equal Opportunity Higher Educ

ABSTRACT

This paper is a call to meet new challenges to ensure equal opportunity for historically African American colleges and universities. The paper suggests an inter-institutional effort among members of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education that begins internally and then moves beyond the institutions into the public forum. The following principles are emphasized: (1) recognition by faculty and staff that there is a tradition of at-risk children being able to learn; (2) successful instruction in basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic using mastery learning concepts; (3) development of curricula, teaching techniques, materials, and activities to ensure that students learn the skills necessary to develop new models of enterprise; (4) development of independent economic enterprises at historically black colleges and universities that would provide endowments and operating funds and thus free institutions from the need to depend on philanthropy and public funding; and (5) encouragement of active alumni groups who give money, provide mentoring, are good recruiters, and support public relations efforts. Also suggested is a new social contract between institutions and students emphasizing the responsibilities on both sides. (CH)

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ED 408 899

# "EQUALIZING OPPORTUNITY IN NAFEO INSTITUTIONS: A CASE FOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ACTION"

by

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**A paper presented to the Twentieth Annual Conference of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, March, 1995 at the Washington Hilton Hotel.**

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## EQUALIZING OPPORTUNITY

In 1995, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education continues its legacy of dealing with topics and issues central to the well being of historically and predominantly African American colleges and universities. This week's conference focuses on equalizing opportunity which is a timely topic especially in light of the nation's changing political and economic contexts.

The elections of 1994, have caused our republic to be set upon by new centurions riding different chariots in the same arena and playing the same old games. While these players hoist new colors in the winds of change, these flags also fade when illuminated by truth and they rip and tear because they are not justice soaked tarpaulins but are opportunistic, washable silk that is neither color-fast nor wind-sturdy. The town crier, Mr. Gingrich, exercises his vocal chords and still fights to apprise the world of his existence, while cheered on by neophytes, novices and "know no better's". Despite the boisterousness of the purported new unity of purpose of the new Congress, a cacophony of disorganization and indecision, misstatement and "pseudo-analyses" prevails instead of the symphony of coalition, consideration, consensus and caution needed for the development

positive change to occur.

One shudders to think of what these high-stepping potential blunderers will do in our realm – the realm of education. Needless to say, we do not have the time to wait for them to show their hands completely before we take action. We cannot afford to be reactive but we must be proactive and in charge of our destinies. We must let them know what is our vision for our institutions. We must define what we need and what we expect, rather than refine what we get.

The ability to turn a problem or challenge into an opportunity has always been a strength of the HBCU's. Today our new challenges require the enlistment of our inter-institutional "brain trust" and a power thrust to ensure that the opportunities we offer to our students are not snuffed out because of the activation of a clichéd, programmatic initiative which may very well turn out to mean "bootstrapping". We know that bootstrapping is impossible when you are barefoot and thus, we must not allow new phrases, defining the same expectation, enable those who would, to undermine the legislative promises, appropriations and allocations to our institutions.

Equalizing opportunity at NAFEO institutions, other institutions and in school districts must begin internally and then extend to external publics. We must look into our glass houses and make bricks of clay and straw rather than new glass bricks so that our institutions will withstand the winds of change and not be blown

from side to side but will stand as models of possibilities.

These models for equalizing opportunities through new possibilities can begin with:

1. The recommitment of the faculty and staff at HBCU's to the missions of these institutions which recognize that so called non-traditional students have a tradition of being able to learn.
    a. The faculty and staff must be educated in the philosophy of inclusion and the liberating qualities of education.
    b. The faculty and staff must believe that the institutions they represent and the students with whom they work are of value
    c. The faculty and staff of these institutions must believe that their association with the students and institution has value in the eyes of their colleagues.
2. The teaching of the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic is not mysterious but is achievable in a minimal amount of time if addressed with a mastery learning concept.
3. The development of curricula, teaching techniques, strategies, materials and activities which ensure that students learn the precepts,

skills, processes and procedures in the cognitive and affective cultures necessary for the development of new models of enterprise .

4. The development of independent economic enterprises at HBCU's which allow for the funding of endowments and operational funds thereby liberating HBCU's from their dependence on the largesse, philanthropy and understanding of public office holders and others.

5. The activation of alumni of HBCU's in order that they can offer testimonies of the success of HBCU's because of their statuses as eye witnesses to the power of HBCU's to develop educated and efficacious individuals.

A literal translation of the word opportunity from the Latin is something that comes before a haven. America has provided that something before the haven or harbor to many groups. To persons of color, often the haven or harbor has been hidden or at best elusive. However, through the protests, politics and persistence of these disenfranchised persons and their supporters, many doors were opened which resulted in the education of many who would have been left out but for these efforts.

The education of African Americans at the undergraduate level by NAFEO institutions has not only meant the teaching of concepts and skills appropriate for study at colleges and universities, but it has also meant the teaching of skills and

concepts appropriate to elementary and secondary levels of education. Notwithstanding lab schools, historically, some students enrolled at some HBCU's went to elementary school, high school and college at the same institutions. This comprehensive responsibility of education of African Americans fell to these HBCU's because of segregation, distance from an operating school and lack of resources to pay for an education. If these students were to be educated, it was only possible at these institutions. The HBCU's answered these challenges over a period of one hundred years by providing elementary, secondary and post-secondary education.

During those years NAFEO institutions were filled with faculties who believed that their students could be educated, despite previous conditions of miseducation, despite the vicissitudes of poverty and despite the expectations of the society that they would be "ne'er do wells". The faculty in these institutions believed in the missions of their institutions and the abilities of their students. They did not approach their students with "blame the victim" attitudes nor did they permit the students to use their circumstances as excuses for less than excellent academic performance or social responsibility.

Today, stories of successful teachers have begun to be publicized wherein the teacher being depicted, was able to foster excellence in his of her students, against

all odds. Hollywood has become fascinated with such efforts by publishing true stories of such efforts in "Lean on Me" and "Stand and Deliver" and in fictional accounts such as "Sister Act" and "Sister Act Two". In each of these instances "a teacher" has not permitted students, who have been left out society's reward structures, to develop a "poverty of spirit", thereby subscribing to life-long economic and spiritual poverty. These publicized teachers and the less publicized ones who made differences in our lives did not allow us to develop "learned helplessness". The adage of "children live up to your expectations" was a basic tenet to their professional practices. They expected their students to learn and they did. Now we expect our African American students, female students, developmentally disabled students and even our gifted students to be "at risk" and they live up to our expectations.

In the nineties, American educators are willing to allow an inference to be drawn that our educational systems are largely able to deal with sameness only, and that children who are not white, male and without obvious impairment are the only persons who can be guaranteed success. All others who succeed will have to be characterized as "at risk" and be provided special services. These services purportedly include using more sensitive textbooks, teachers trained to recognize that differences serve as assets rather than deficits, and teachers who are knowledgeable about teaching and learning techniques and research.

Although educators define the allegedly different children as being "at risk", it is public education which is "at risk". Public education has continued with a homogenization emphasis which has become increasingly unable to eliminate differences through assimilation or dispiriting those who differ. Historically the children in our American schools have been different because of their immigrant parents or the fact that they were immigrants themselves. The truth while known before is now being told that the white male, even though of primary or secondary immigrant status, was the target for success in American public schools and in the larger society. Therefore, being at risk is not a new phenomenon visited upon urban youth because of the so-called ineffectiveness of their families, but women and people of color have always been "at risk" in America. In other words the schools were never designed for their successes. This truth is being acknowledged now, but instead of saying that our models do not adequately meet the needs of our people we coin a new phrase, "at risk", with the result of, once again, putting the onus on the individual. further, we say to our teachers that this is a special group of people with special needs which the system can't meet. We say that in order to reach these students teachers need extra training and special materials. The teacher then thinks "well, why should I have to have extra training? Why can't these people learn the

same way everybody else learns? In other words the teacher believes that the person who falls into the "at risk" categories is getting more help than the teacher did as a student. Therefore, this effort is another special program to give Blacks and others special privileges.

Additionally, the school systems and external critics have developed a mystique about "the three R's" which would have them be seen as teachable and learnable only through massive, comprehensive, complex processes and that only middle class, well-resourced, two parents in the home children can achieve. On the other hand there are persons who understand that "the three R's" are only the beginning of the education process and that they can be taught to any motivated learner regardless to previous or current condition of language or resources. Ergo the increasing privatization of education wherein such diverse companies as Sylvan, Singer, Kumon and other private companies too numerous to mention in this presentation, guarantee parents who can pay that they can deliver the knowledge. These companies do not limit their promises to your score on an "at risk" scale.

Throughout the world it has been known that education is a precipitant to and supporter of liberation which is the major premise upon which our NAFEO institutions were founded. Toward this end and in order to ensure the maintenance of a democratic republic which requires a literate populous, America created a

complex system of land grant institutions backed up by systems of state universities. Our public school systems were founded on these tenets which were underscored by federal, state and local tax support.

Stopsky and Lee in their text on social studies methods make two statements which civil rights organizations, courts, churches and community organizations have stated over the years.

Schools are a powerful influence on determining adult status. [1]

School is the arena in which struggle for justice in American society occurs.[2]

But, somewhere in the last thirty years, the educational enterprise at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, began to lose integrity and become overrun with the "masked" and "the unmasked" who are not committed to the education of students, either because of their lack of faith in their students or their lack of faith in themselves or their lack of faith in the ability of education to make a difference in the quality of life of the educated or perhaps it is due to their lack of subject matter knowledge or training. Not only are these levelers on our campuses but they have developed into critical masses in public school educational systems. Now we receive students on our campuses who do not know, often because they have not been taught; who don't believe in themselves, largely

because no one has believed in them previously; who have never experienced the joy and sense of accomplishment of learning something which seemed incomprehensibly difficult. When they arrive on our campuses instead of the social contract they used to get, we allow some our faculty members and staff members to operate and communicate "diminished expectations" which result in a social contract with an implicit expectation for second best.

When we finish our initial assessments and discover that these new students cannot read, write or compute on the level of a "nationally normed" undergraduate student, we put them in our specially numbered courses to ensure their and our financial solvency, but our contract ends there. We do not seem to understand how to "catch them up" nor do we have faculty and staff throughout our colleges and universities who are <u>really committed</u> to bringing about this stepped up learning.

Many faculty and staff among us want to teach only those who already know or those who could learn on their own if given the materials and resources. They spend many committee and faculty meeting hours presenting their personal accounts of the many ways in which these students do not measure up to the level of performance of the "normed" undergraduate. They reminisce to their undergraduate education, not for understandings of how teachers unlocked concepts for them, but looking for ways to show that our students represent the epitome of the deficit model. The things that they identify as wrong with the

students are attributed to the faults of the public education systems. Then they go on to argue that the education systems cannot be expected to take the place of the family and they argue in this continuous, backward manner to try and establish causal relationships which basically end with the assumption that previous conditions of the student prevent the institution from providing an education. When we have large numbers of faculty and staff who do not support our missions, there is no way we can achieve them.

No other business enterprise would allow its production staff to subvert and distort the product. But we do. We need to expose the fact that many who are on our payrolls do not support our missions. This should not become a "calling out" but an exposure of the infection in the wound so that it can be treated.

The missions of HBCU's were able to be supported and achieved in years gone by with less resources, fewer personnel and with the constant threat of physical peril. This overriding of the potential impact of negative forces was achievable primarily because of the commitment of the faculties and staffs to the mission of the institutions and the belief of these persons in the abilities of their students. This synergetic amalgamation enabled the students to subscribe to higher qualities of life than would have been available to them otherwise.

Let us, by example, contrast our tolerance of excuses for failure to deliver services and product development to the medical arena. Suppose you were an alcoholic and had developed, unbeknownst to you, an ulcerated liver which suddenly became aggravated causing you much pain and distress. You went to the emergency room at the nearest hospital and the doctor assigned to your case began to ask the following questions which you answered in the following way.

"Mrs.Doe, I'm Doctor Knowall. Before we run some tests, I need to ask you a few questions. Are you married?"

"No, Doctor, I'm not.

"Were you ever married?"

"No, Doctor."

"I smell liquor all over you, Mrs. Doe. Do you drink every day?

"Yes, Doctor. I drink every day".

"Do you eat well when you are drinking?"

"No, Doctor."

"Did your parents read to you about drinking or tell you that drinking was bad for you? As a matter of fact did they drink?"

Well, Mrs. Doe, I think you have an ulcerated liver. I'm going to run the tests but I don't think that we can do anything for you, because you haven't done what you should have done to be healthy. I'm sorry about the pain but you'll just have to endure it.

None of us would expect such a scenario to be played out in a hospital

situation, but daily, in public school education and in higher education some among us make reference to such a model which says that if what you bring into the situation is less than what is expected, we cannot help you. This belies the intents, missions and unique qualities of our institutions. HBCU's have said historically that we could do what others have not done and we did it. Some have referred to us as "Statue of Liberty" institutions because we have said give us your tired, your weak, your poor, and huddled masses and we will produce the geniuses, the scholars and the professionals to be the torchbearers in new and existing fields of endeavor.

Now many people on our campuses do not believe this is possible. Many of these persons were educated by these same institutions. Many were poor and of color and arrived at these campuses as students with limited resources. Many were not of color but and many were first-generation college graduates. Some of the persons serving as faculty and staff at HBCU's want to be at great "research" institutions and feel "put upon" by being at a HBCU's or PCBU's because they know that our systems are not going to provide the salaries and "perks" available at other institutions; they will only be paid less for doing more. The net result of this is that we have many persons working at our campuses who would rather be somewhere else due to economic reasons and due to the fact that their colleagues and they feel

they are less than "academic" when they are required to reach and teach those persons for whom society has no hope. So to use Spike Lee's term we have many "wannabe's" at our schools who communicate in many ways to their students their frustrations with themselves, the institutions, and the students.

In 1995, we should establish a new social contract with our students. Our agreement should be that if you come to our campuses, if you go to class every day, if you do your work and if we identify weaknesses and show you how to develop them into strengths, we can assure your success as a student and an enhanced quality of life as an adult. This intensive care social contract is in keeping with our missions. We must go further and say to our students that although you are starting out with a different level of skills than we expected, we will not penalize you. Everyone on our campuses believes that you can succeed and everyone here is committed to your success. Your road will not be easy but it can be traversed. Travel may be hard at first but after reaching some inclines, it will become easier.

Our motivation of the students is possible only after we motivate the faculty and staff. They must begin to realize that among "academicians" they can stand tall when they can say that despite the fact that some of our students come in as victims of educational malpractice, we have been able to teach them, work with them and develop them into life-long learners who can compete effectively in the marketplace and live morally in our communities.

Currently, some of our faculty and staff have been allowed to develop into lethargic, undisciplined "pseudo intellectuals" who would blow cold winds of negativity into the faces of our students. A case in point is a story told to me recently of a fully tenured Caucasian professor who, at a faculty meeting, told the following joke:

> "Cassius Clay changed his name to Mohammed Ali. Lou Alcindor changed is name to Kareem Abdul Jabaar. Well, Buck Wheat is changing his name to Cream of Wheat".

This person was a Ph. D. from an accredited institution. Most of his colleagues agreed that he had no idea of the level of insensitivity he was showing. We can be assured that this person would have not said these things in this kind of meeting a few years ago . Rather he would have at least pretended to be "morally correct" by his attention to being "politically correct". But today, we are allowing persons to argue that the use of terminology is based simply on being "politically correct", a phrase which means, primarily, that one does not use terminology which would offend interest groups and thereby precipitate their organized resistance to ideas and programs. It is said often by these offenders that the requirement that they use less than offensive terms is an infringement on their First Amendment rights and also on the truth as they perceive it to be. We have gotten entangled in

this web of sophistic logic as opposed to involvement in the central issue. That is, our faculties and staffs should be concerned the establishment of programs, activities, terminology and actions which are morally correct and which are based on morally correct philosophies. These efforts should not be viewed as attempts to homogenize education but they should be seen as significant efforts to operationalize the missions of our institutions.

Our campuses must equalize opportunities by conducting faculty and staff workshops which deal with racism and sexism as well as other categories of difference. Our faculty, who are insensitive to inclusion as a philosophy and strategies appropriate to that philosophy, need to be trained in these measures. The commitment to the respect for differences must be part of the raison d'etre of the institution. Faculty and staff who cannot support inclusion after training in these areas need to be counseled into disassociating themselves with NAFEO institutions. Our students, alumni, faculty, staff, and programs deserve to have team members who believe in the product and the possibilities of producing the product. Their job is difficult enough by virtue of having to corrode the vestiges of educational neglect. It must not be stymied by infusion of the poisons while taking the antitoxins. Thus, within the parameters of academic freedom, institutions must insist that faculty and staff support the institutional mission and the student populations which are served. To do less is immoral and perhaps criminal.

Our campus personnel must abandon their externally promulgated self concepts which talk about and underscore our deficiencies and say nothing about our strengths. Individuals and institutions which are externally defined seldom find success in the definer's eyes. Somehow we must get our faculties and staffs to be excited about the positive differences they can make in their students, and ultimately, in society. We need to make changes and document them. We need to do research about our models for success and publish them. It is reported that there are many more research studies about less than successful students than about successful ones. We must find ways to reward our faculty for their commitment to our students and programs.

NAFEO institutions have consistently struggled over the years to get America to equalize opportunities by the provision systemic educational rewards to African American students whose parents have paid taxes over many years for the education of all. Rather than to dump tea in a harbor as a symbol of protest, the presidents and campus personnel, alumni and students have dumped their anger and tears in rivers of sorrow while yet pursuing higher education goals and objectives with less than full representation for their taxes. It has been a moral struggle with immoral foes. However, we have taken the moral high ground and still

sought to get the greatest benefit for the most people.

In 1995, our struggle is even more important because our institutions still depend on external sources of funding much of which comes from public treasuries. This inability to fund ourselves is probably our biggest liability even though there are many understandable reasons why this is so. But, we must recognize that an oppressor, no matter how unintentional, incomprehensible, or complex his oppression, is seldom going to involve himself totally in the revocation of his oppression by funding it or by educating the oppressed. Although we must continue to demand our shares of the tax dollars for the support of our institutions and the achievement of parity in school districts thus, giving us taxation with representation, we must continue to equalize opportunities economically by examining funding possibilities with new vigor. We know that the costs of education are too high for students, through their tuition, to support the institutions which precipitates the dependency on federal and state dollars for support. Even though our UNCF institutions get funds from private sources but still generally get two thirds of their budgets from some configuration of public dollars. With the new faces in Congress, whom we have not lobbied, our trepidations increase daily because we are not sure which programs supported by the public treasury may be the next put on somebody's list of things to cut. So, although to use Dr. King's words, there might still be a promissory note due and owing from the public, we are not sure the extent

to which these new centurions feel a moral obligation to higher education at NAFEO institutions. Thus, while we lobby the Congress and the state legislators for continued support we also must activate our alumni support, increase our endowments, foster the "work college concept on our campuses and develop our students so that they understand the effort required of them to ensure their and their families' ascensions from poverty to economic self sufficiency.

Due to the tight budgets of our institutions, we have the need to use small staffs to deal with large jobs and some jobs get neglected. For instance, many of our campuses have done little to develop their alumni. Often we do not have Alumni Directors or, if we do, they have more than one hat to wear. Frequently, these persons have no staff and are pressed into service primarily for homecoming and for commencement. Sometimes alumni groups are allowed to de velop into political liabilities involved in "in-fighting" problems and/or splinter groups and due to lack of training for their roles, try to develop their constituencies into micro-managers which undermine the presidents and programs of our campuses. Sometimes these negative effects develop because many of our campuses have no real list of alumni, no alumni newsletter, no vehicle through which the positive support of alumni can be channeled and coordinated and certainly no training for alumni. Frequently, to

get a list we have to go to external sources who for a fee, utilizing names and social security numbers will develop updated address lists for our alumni.

But suppose, alumni support became an active program on every campus. To be sure, we would need to understand and identify what that support should entail. Alumni can give money, time as mentors, be good recruiters for the institution and provide a substantial degree of public relations support.

A simple example of potential alumni economic support can be drawn. For example, suppose a NAFEO institution graduated 75 students per year for which it could develop an inclusive list for the past thirty years. The list, so produced, would have a population equal to 75 times 30 or an n of 2250 alumni. Suppose these persons were contacted and they agreed to and did send $10 a year to the institution plus pay for an alumni magazine at $5 per year. This would generate $22,500 in dues and $11,250 in public relations funds. Some of these persons would give more than $100 per year. But an institution could decide to absorb the cost of these activities in its annual budget plus a possible $22,000 for salary of the alumni director, the total $33,750 generated annually could be put it in endowment rather than in operations. The $100 or more dollar contributors would increase especially if they received recognition for their contributions, and if they thought they were endowing the institutions.

The institution could decide that the contribution by alumni through

mentoring, visibility on campus and recruitment in their localities of residence was a substantial enough contribution to allow for the support of the alumni director to come from the campus budget. This would allow the use of alumni contributions to placed into endowment funds. Alumni chapters could be developed in cities where significant numbers of alumni were in residence. The development of programs of support and recruitment efforts in these locales could be fostered by the Alumni Director. There could possibly be limitless positive results from the development of alumni support. In these days of increased assessment of effectiveness, who, better than alumni, can tell of the impact on their lives of these institutions?

Many of the NAFEO institutions are well over one hundred years old. Some have been in existence for nearly two hundred years. Part of the rich history associated with these institutions is associated with the fact that they were able to survive prior to financial aid and other forms of federal and state support. Part of their survival was supported by the enterprises that the colleges had such as brick factories, farms, dairies, choir tours and the like. These enterprises enabled these colleges to equalize educational opportunities. Today many of these previously self-sufficient campuses have become primarily dependent upon the largesse of public tax payers and private donors.

Berea College and the College of the Ozarks are two predominantly white institutions which are small and in the mid-west. Both of these institutions have endowments large enough that they can run for the next ten years without taking in another dime. These colleges cater to poor students. As a matter of fact, you cannot attend these colleges if you can afford to pay for your tuition. They are work colleges. Their students must work, but they graduate with no debt. While they make creative uses of Title IV funds, they have products and services on their campuses which generate funds for operations. They each have existed for better than a hundred years so their models are tried and tested. Plus, they are willing to share the models with those persons and institutions which are interested. Perhaps we need to return to our institutional commitments to the work ethic and roll up our sleeves and get busy instead of just worrying about what the Republicans are going to do now.

In summary we must equalize opportunity on our campuses through social contracts for success for our students, our faculty, our alumni and our future students which will ensure future economic independence for our institutions.